

**Programme Delivery & Assessment Policy**

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**Introduction**

Under Quality & Qualification Ireland’s *Criteria and Procedures for the Delegation and Review of Delegation of Authority to Make Awards* (HETAC, 2004), Athlone Institute of Technology has been awarded delegated authority to make awards in all relevant fields up to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications and, in certain specified areas, to Level 10. As a responsible institution with delegated degree-awarding powers, AIT maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves along with the enhancements to any given programme and this establishes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its ongoing monitoring and review, and can facilitate the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Athlone Institute of Technology is committed to ensuring that these delegated degree-awarding powers are exercised appropriately and accordingly it has in place effective arrangements for the governance and management of those powers. This includes defining the role and responsibilities of the statutory Academic Council and the Vice President Academic & Registrar as the senior academic body and individual with the responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards; setting out the governance and management framework for academic standards and quality; and defining how operational functions will be delegated.

The institute encourages differing modes of delivery appropriate to any given programme. Any proposed mode of delivery will be evaluated initially on how it addresses student characteristics and the requirements of a given cohort of learners. The preferred mode of delivery will be consistent with the pedagogical and presentational requirements of the subject matter and reflect the preferred teaching strategy, both in terms of methodologies and learning outcomes. The proposed delivery model will be evaluated at the initial programme development stage and will be reviewed as part of the regular monitoring of a programme.

In respect of assessment, this policy complements the detail set out within the institute’s Standards, Assessment, & Awards document. Assessment there refers to that employed in the context of taught provision, and for the recognition of prior learning. Institute policy is concerned with the processes in place to enable assessment designed both to promote student learning and to enable academic staff to make informed judgements about the extent to which applicable intended learning outcomes have been satisfied as the basis for progression to credit and qualifications. Such processes centrally include the facility for formative feedback to learners. Institute policy encourages proactive engagement on the part of the college and its staff to ensure that learners have the fullest understanding of good academic practice and equally have some acquaintance with the complexities of the assessment process.

Athlone Institute of Technology as a relevant higher education provider under the terms of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 is obliged under Section 45 (3) (b) of that Act to

*…establish procedures which are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by the Authority under section 49(1) are acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners.*

Such procedures are set out within the institute’s Standards, Assessment, & Awards document. Similarly the institute has a procedure for the recognition of prior learning, which enables any and every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

**Commitment**

Athlone Institute of Technology sets out here the intention that its service delivery to students and stakeholders will be timely, inclusive, and that it reflects identified individual and societal needs. The institute is committed to respect the rights of all and its Strategic Plan 2014-2018 commits the organization to embrace diversity, and equality of opportunity.

Since its foundation, AIT has been rooted in the fabric of the Irish midlands. This has seen the institute play a catalytic role in the life of the region, recognizing the levels of engagement and connectivity that exist between the institute and the wider community. The institute will continue to endeavour to work closely with stakeholders to identify community needs and meet these needs in meaningful ways with an ultimate focus on benefits and positive outcomes for all.

The related Stakeholder Engagement Policy commits the college to work closely with stakeholders and to affording individuals, groups, agencies, and organizations a voice in the strategic development and operations of the institution.

**Management of Programme Delivery**

The general arrangements for the management of programme delivery are specified here. Such arrangements will be included in the programme specification and are subject to scrutiny and approval by the internal processes including the Academic Strategy & Quality Committee before a programme can be proposed to an external expert panel for validation and adoption by the institute’s academic council. Such arrangements, including programme delivery and assessment are also subject to period review processes.

**Responsibilities of Individual Staff**

Under the stipulations of Section 84 (10) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland has the responsibility to determine

*…the standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by a learner before an award may be made by the Authority or by a provider to whom authority to make an award has been delegated.*

Athlone Institute of Technology exercises its responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards through a set of duties and procedures undertaken by its staff, both academic, support, and administrative, who together contribute to the effectiveness of the institution’s quality assurance and enhancement procedures. Accordingly, each individual member of the institution’s staff who is engaged in the development, delivery, support, oversight, or administration of a taught programme has an identified role in the quality assurance of that programme.

**Programme Team**

Programme development, delivery, management, monitoring, and enhancement relies on the expertise and enthusiasm of many members of the staff community within AIT. These typically work within programme teams and are guided by a dedicated programme board. Programme teams have an important role in supporting the institute’s responsibility for the quality of the learner experience and in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the programmes they deliver.

With respect to arrangements for programmes involving external partners, all such matters, including delivery and assessment, are subject to the governing stipulations set out in the institute’s Policy for Collaborative and Transnational Provision.

**Programme Board**

Every validated programme of education and training approved by the Academic Council of the institution that leads to a national award will be responsibility of a Head of Department (or equivalent) and shall have appointed to it a Programme Board established under the authority of the Academic Council consistent with college regulations. The composition and operation of each Programme Board is set out in the institute’s committee structure documentation.

The programme board will support the head of department in the management and monitoring of the programme. Programme boards will include learner representatives in line with the commitment of the college to the maximum involvement of students up to the governance of the institute and its programmes. The Programme Board will consider feedback from learners and make recommendations for programme enhancement. Subject to support from faculty and department management, such proposals for enhancement will be tabled for consideration by the Academic Strategy & Quality Committee. In the case of collaborative provision, enhancements are governed by the Policy for Collaborative and Transnational Provision.

Terms of reference for a Programme Board are specified in the institute’s committee structure documentation.

**Programme Coordinator**

It is the advice of the institute that a programme coordinator be identified for each taught programme of education and training. This individual is the identified champion for the programme and will on occasion have been party to the instigation of that programme; however, this need not necessarily be the case. The appointment and duration of office of a Programme Coordinator shall be determined by the relevant Head of Department (or equivalent) and in consultation with the appropriate Dean of Faculty. Where a programme is a cross-departmental/faculty offering, the appointment shall be made by the relevant Dean following consultation with appropriate colleagues.

Learners will identify closely with a Programme Coordinator and significant responsibilities attach to the role. Such Programme Coordinator deserve strong departmental and faculty support to enable them to manage the role appropriately. A Programme Coordinator will work closely with the relevant Head of Department.

**Other Programme Officers**

In a complex organization such as Athlone Institute of Technology, programmes can require differing levels of staff involvement and support. The Programme Coordinator will require assistance from other colleagues with particular expertise. This will vary from programme to programme. Academic, support, and administrative staff that contribute to any given programme have a legitimate input to the monitoring and enhancement of the offering and their reflections make a valuable contribution to the quality of that programme. Such staff include the personnel from Student Resources who support learners in various ways, both academic and pastoral.

**Student Representatives for a programme**

A student is elected by their peers to represent their interests and to sit on the Programme Board. The institute advocates that student representatives be full members of the Programme Board; there should be only limited topics which are reserved items that are discussed by staff only. The student representative will represent their fellow students and are also entitled to bring key issues concerning the management of the programme such as learning, teaching, assessment, and learning support to the attention of the Programme Board and/or the Head of Department. Student feedback is also essential in the continuing Monitoring and enhancement process; such feedback forms an important part of annual monitoring and features largely within the period programmatic reviews. The student representative is best placed to advise on the quality of the student learning experience and this will feature largely on the agenda for the Programme Board. Similarly, the student representative has a valuable perspective on the proposals for programme development.

The institute will work with the appropriate national authorities to ensure that student representatives are fully aware of their role and equipped for same. The institute will also work with the Athlone Institute of Technology Students’ Union (AITSU) to provide in-house preparation for student representatives. The institute also supports the training that the AITSU itself provides to students who fulfil various roles and responsibilities. Both the AITSU and the academic leaders should encourage student representatives to avail of the opportunity to engage with the training provided.

The National Survey of Student Engagement has afforded the students of AIT an opportunity to have their voice heard. Students have engaged with this instrument in impressive numbers over the first years of the survey. This has provided valuable intelligence which has fed into process and programme enhancement. The institution commits to feeding back to the AITSU and to student representatives on the outcomes from the annual survey; to set these in the national context ion order to benchmark the perceptions of AIT’s students against those of peers in other national HEIs and, where available, to provide international comparators. This feedback will include the actions being proposed, or taken, by the institute on the foot or recommendations or criticisms from the student body.

**Student Programme Information**

Athlone Institute of Technology is committed to providing enhanced advance information for intending students prior to college entry. This will be delivered, in part, through an improved web presence. Incoming students are provided with an integrated registration and induction process which has been revised repeatedly over recent years following student feedback and institute reflection. At the commencement of their studies, students are provided with programme information which sets out the pathways through the programme and which identifies units that are compulsory, optional, or elective. It specifies the delivery mode and the assessment regime applicable to each level or component of the programme. It provides students with the basis on which they will be assessed for an award, and it relates the assessment requirements to the aims and objectives of the programme, the required learning outcomes and the standard of its final and, where applicable, any interim awards.

The programme timetable is also provided along with the specific requirements for the modules within the programme. This will provide information on the learning and teaching strategies and activities. It also comprises the assessment strategies, submission dates and requirements, and links to the student supports available including Moodle access, which constitutes the institute virtual learning environment. Through the information provided, students can identify all the elements that will be assessed including any assessed supervised work experience, work-related or placement learning. Attendance expectations are also specified in the documentation along with consequences for non-attendance or late submission of work. The information will include contact details for programme staff and arrangements that are in place for programme organization and student participation in the quality management of their learning. Links will also be provided to institute regulations and procedures including the Standards, Assessment, & Awards document, the Student Handbook, the library, and various policies that allow for redress if a student feels they have been unfairly treated. This will include a link to Student Resources and the various offices that are available to assist and direct students at different stages on their academic path.

Much of the information will be provided by the faculty and Programme Board who will be aware that the student information reflects the quality of their offering. Such documentation will also be available to external agencies for review and scrutiny.

The Student Resources office publishes annually its Graduate Destinations Survey. This provides information on the path taken by graduates from AIT, be it in employment or further study or otherwise, six months after graduation. The survey is available to all students and provides insight into employment levels, salary ranges, gender balance, and also affords students additional information around pathways and career options.